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SIPDIS

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A/S PRM SAUERBREY, AND PRM/AFR
AFR/AA KALMQUIST, WWARREN, JBORNS, KNELSON, CTHOMPSON
DCHA/AA MHESS, GGOTTLIEB
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NAIROBI FOR OFDA/ECARO GPLATT, RFFPO NCOX, USAID/EA
ROME FOR AMBASSADOR, OHA, HSPANOS
BRUSSELS FOR USEU PBROWN
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SUBJECT: USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TEAM: PHASE I FINDINGS AND NEXT
STEPS

SUMMARY

11. During the December 20 to January 31 Phase I of the U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance Team (HAT) in Ethiopia presence, USG HAT staff conducted multiple humanitarian assessment trips to the conflict-affected areas of Somali Region, including Degehabur, Fik, Gode, and Korahe zones. USG HAT staff did not observe indicators of an immediate crisis within areas visited. However, based on regional assessments, USG HAT staff note that humanitarian and food security conditions could significantly deteriorate in the coming weeks as a result of the cumulative impact of poor food aid delivery mechanisms, current disruptions on commercial trade and livestock movement, reduced access to and delivery of essential health services, restricted humanitarian access and movement, and the poor performance of the 2007 rains.

12. To mitigate deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Somali Region in the coming weeks, USG HAT staff recommend improved food aid distribution; independent standardized nutritional surveys in conflict-affected areas; support for the regional measles campaign; increased commercial trade; and improved humanitarian access and

movement.

13. As of February 1, the USG HAT presence in Ethiopia has transitioned from Phase I, focused on gaining access and assessing current humanitarian conditions in the region, to Phase II with a focus on advocacy, monitoring, and program management. End summary.

PHASE I

14. Between December 20 and January 31, the USG HAT, composed of technical experts from USAID and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in coordination with USAID/Ethiopia and the U.S. Embassy in Addis has conducted multiple field assessments in Somali Region to examine health, nutrition, food security, livelihoods, and water and sanitation conditions in the region as part of Phase I of the USG HAT presence in Ethiopia. During Phase I, the USG HAT staff were successful in gaining access to conflict-affected areas in Somali Region; monitoring USG interventions; energizing and strengthening UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) confidence; and identifying gaps in humanitarian assistance and obstacles to response efforts.

USG HAT ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

15. USG HAT staff did not observe indicators of an immediate crisis within areas visited. However, based on regional assessments, USG HAT staff report that humanitarian and food security conditions could significantly deteriorate in the coming weeks as a result of

the cumulative impact of poor food aid delivery mechanisms, current restrictions on commercial trade and livestock movement, reduced access to and delivery of essential health services, restricted humanitarian access and movement, and the poor performance of the 2007 rains. In the absence of the resumption of commercial trade, the delay in the delivery, mismanagement, and diversion of food assistance represent a significant threat to humanitarian conditions, including 745,000 people in need of immediate food assistance within the conflict-affected areas and an additional 840,000 people at risk identified by the (GFDRE) Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) Deyr/Karan Assessment. Current obstacles to food aid delivery in Somali Region include required military escorts; minimal capacity within UN World Food Program (WFP) and DPPA to effectively target, monitor, and deliver assistance; mismanagement and diversion of food aid; and the confinement of a large percentage of food aid to district capitals.

USG HAT RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

16. To mitigate deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Somali Region in the coming weeks, USG HAT staff recommend specific interventions and improvements in access and movement in the region. USG HAT, USAID/OFDA, and USAID/Ethiopia staff have initiated efforts to advocate and implement the following recommendations.

-- Improve food aid distribution. USAID/Ethiopia has contacted WFP/Rome to communicate concerns regarding current obstacles to food aid delivery and distribution and advocate for improved targeting and monitoring mechanism. In addition, USG HAT and USAID/Ethiopia ALT staff are regularly meeting with WFP and the DPPA in Addis Ababa to address operational concerns. WFP has also agreed to incorporate USAID staff in WFP field monitoring teams in the region. USAID/FFP has contributed 78.9 metric tons (MT) of emergency food aid valued at approximately \$44.2 million to Somali Region, since June 2007.

-- Allow the current supplementary feeding program to be expanded in the five conflict-affected zones. USAID/FFP has provided necessary food assistance to implement supplemental feeding programs and are discussing next steps with WFP.

-- Establish a USAID field presence in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone. USG HAT staff have negotiated a tentative approval for the establishment of office space in Kebridehar to be co-located with the UN, pending U.S. Embassy Resident Security Officer (RSO), USAID/Ethiopia, U.S. Embassy, and UN approval.

-- Support the early February Somali Region measles campaign. USG HAT and USAID/Ethiopia effectively advocated for a February 2008 regional measles campaign in response to concerns for a potential outbreak in the region resulting from poor vaccination coverage rates and expected declines in nutrition levels. USAID/OFDA is currently reviewing a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) emergency measles campaign proposal for \$1.5 million to immunize 784,000 children 6 to 59 months of age in Somali Region.

-- Continue and improve the use of mobile health teams within conflict-affected areas. USAID/OFDA has provided \$1.8 million to UNICEF in support of mobile health teams operating in Somali Region. Since January 2008, 14 teams are active in Somali Region.

-- Advocate with the GFDRE and DPPA to allow qualified UN or NGO partners to conduct standardized nutritional surveys in conflict-affected areas to identify vulnerable populations and inform appropriate interventions.

-- Enhance the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and WFP security staffing and capacity in Somali Region to more effectively support humanitarian operations. USAID/Washington is in contact with UNDSS/New York

-- Support additional appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, such as the rehabilitation of boreholes and traditional water reservoirs. To date, USAID/OFDA has provided \$6.6 million for emergency programs in Somali Region, including water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions.

-- Improve humanitarian access and movement. USG HAT staff have communicated concerns regarding recent NGO staff detentions and restricted UN and NGO movement in Warder and Korahe zones to the GFDRE and the U.S. Embassy.

-- Align future USAID/OFDA funding with USAID/Ethiopia long-term planning in Somali Region, including Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas (RELPA), 1207, possible famine funds, or supplemental resources. USAID/OFDA staff are working closely with USAID/Ethiopia to integrate successful relief to development programming and disaster risk reduction planning.

USG HAT TRANSITION

17. As of February 1, the USG HAT presence in Ethiopia has transitioned from Phase I with a focus on gaining access and assessing current humanitarian conditions in the region to Phase II with a focus on advocacy, monitoring, and program management. During Phase II, USG HAT will assist USAID/Ethiopia, implementing partners, and host-country government ministries to implement response programs. USG HAT staff will also develop and disseminate sector specific strategies to assist USAID/Ethiopia with long-term planning in the region to integrate humanitarian assistance needs and development assistance goals and objectives. In addition, USAID is planning to establish a USAID field presence in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone to facilitate additional targeted field visits and enhance coordination and information sharing with UN agencies and NGOs operating in the region.

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